

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)  
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)**

**LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING – September 28, 2005**

**John B. Boy Auditorium, Beardsley Room, 1200 W.C. Owen Road  
Clewiston, FL**

**MEETING REPORT – September 28, 2005**

**INTRODUCTION:**

- **The fourth WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee** meeting was held in Clewiston, FL.
- Presentations:
  - Draft SFWMD Governing Board Resolution: Lake Okeechobee Water Control Plan and Revisions to WSE Schedule
  - Aquifer Storage and Recovery
  - Water Quality Protection Programs
  - Agricultural “Best Management Practices”
  - Phosphorous Reduction Projects
  - Technical Sub-Committee Update
- Presentations will be posted to <http://www.sfwmd.gov>, “Lake Okeechobee Update”.
- On 9/27/05, the lake was at 15.52 feet, N.G.V.D.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

- Commercial fishermen and processors, fishing guides, small business owners and recreational fishermen attended the meeting. Representatives of those groups said that:
  - the fisheries are all but gone - fish are not being caught;
  - a fish processor in business for more than 30 years was closing its doors;
  - the lake is in the worst shape it has ever been in;
  - this is driving away people who would normally come and fish;
  - the national reputation of the lake as an excellent freshwater fishery gained over the years has been seriously hurt;
  - it does not appear that anything is being done to help the lake.

**MEMBER ISSUES/DISCUSSION BY COMMITTEE:**

- FWCC fish surveys are not turning up any young large mouth bass. This could mean a recovery period of at least two-three years once water quality and lake levels are improved.
- Kissimmee River restoration is working – wildlife doing very well; so the problems of the lake can be fixed. Lake is positioned fairly well going into the dry season. Need to act to fix the problems.
- SFWMD needs to complete Supply Side Management Plan.

- Need peer review of in-lake dredging proposals: this may be cheaper than buying 90,000 acres of land for additional storage.
- Sediment needs to be removed or it will continue to be stirred up by storms.
- Common sense solutions: stop spraying vegetation thereby preventing further breakdown of the lake ecosystem and manage the lake at lower levels.
- Need “fast-track” analysis on effects of spraying, costs, impacts of not spraying, etc.
- Need to understand more about sediments: what size and composition? Earlier dredging studies showed the amount removed by dredging would be countered by amount coming in. Must continue to remove sources from inflows.
- Need to prevent re-suspension of fine sediments in any dredging project.
- SFWMD staff needs to post the previous dredging studies.
- Don’t spray during spawning or waterfowl migration periods.
- Connect C-44 to the St. Johns system and let excess floodwaters flow north, as they did historically.
- Declare a moratorium on spraying and just keep the navigation and access channels open.
- Need floating and submerged plants to come back to help settle the lake down.
- Need baseline information on 2004-05 rainfall, inflows, outflows and water quality; previously requested.
- Need report on storage options. Still getting Level III pulse releases to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie systems; blue/green algae blooms persisting.
- Resolutions will be forthcoming from Sanibel, Ft. Myers Beach, Lee County Convention Bureau and others, seeking collaboration on ideas to fix the problems. Want to be part of the solution.
- Rep. Machek: Advocated getting the lake level down. Maybe do more mechanical harvesting of invasive plants. Need to quickly revise the WSE Schedule. Legislature will look at reducing funding for aquatic weed control on the Lake, if warranted.

## **RESULTS/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. DRAFT RESOLUTION:** The WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee, without objection, recommended that the WRAC recommend approval of the draft SFWMD Governing Board Resolution on the Lake Okeechobee Water Control Plan, with the changes underlined in the Preamble, and Sections 1 and 3 of the attached draft resolution.
- 2. AQUATIC PLANT CONTROL MEETING:** The committee recommended that a meeting be held in Clewiston regarding aquatic plant control and impacts on the lake ecosystem, fish and wildlife.

**ATTACHMENT**

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2005-\_\_\_\_\_**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT REQUESTING THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ON AN EXPEDITED BASIS, TAKE ACTIONS NECESSARY TO MODIFY THE LAKE OKEECHOBEE WATER CONTROL PLAN FOR THE PURPOSE OF ACHIEVING A MORE REFINED BALANCE BETWEEN THE COMPETING NEEDS OF THE LAKE AND ESTUARINE ECOSYSTEMS, FLOOD CONTROL, RECREATION, AND WATER SUPPLY; AND ROUTINELY OPERATING THE LAKE AT LOWER LEVELS WHILE ADDRESSING THE MULTI-PURPOSE OBJECTIVES OF THE LAKE THROUGH INSTALLATION AND OPERATION OF FORWARD PUMPS; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

**WHEREAS**, the Water Supply and Environmental (“WSE”) regulation schedule for Lake Okeechobee is established pursuant to federal law and is embodied in the Lake Okeechobee Water Control Plan (“WCP”) developed concurrently with the Final Environmental Impact Statement (“FEIS”) for the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study and approved by Record of Decision dated July 7, 2000; and

**WHEREAS**, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (“COE”), Jacksonville District, issued a Notice of Intent on August 3, 2005 to prepare a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Lake Okeechobee

Regulation Schedule Study, that will supplement the FEIS for the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study prepared in 2000; and

**WHEREAS**, the Project enabling legislation states that the Project must be maintained and operated in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Army; and

**WHEREAS**, the South Florida Water Management District ("District"), as the local sponsor of the Central and Southern Flood Control Project ("Project") pursuant to section 373.103(2), Florida Statutes, is subject to and bound by the federally established Lake Okeechobee WCP; and

**WHEREAS**, the District may, pursuant to federal law, make recommendations or requests of the federal government concerning Lake Okeechobee operations; and

**WHEREAS**, the Lake Okeechobee WCP and associated federal laws recognize the multi-purpose nature of Lake Okeechobee operations and that operations provide for multi-purpose discharges from the Lake such as: flood control releases; water supply releases for estuarine, fish and wildlife, as well as human purposes; and releases for water quality purposes; and

**WHEREAS**, the health of Lake Okeechobee and its native plant and animal life have, for a variety of reasons, declined in recent years; and

**WHEREAS**, some of the primary reasons for the decline in the Lake's health include consistently high water levels due to the current decadal cycle of above normal rainfall, excessive phosphorus loading, and rapid expansion of exotic plants; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2004 the Lake's health was also adversely affected by several hurricanes which exacerbated existing water quality and high water level issues; and

**WHEREAS**, high Lake water levels have also resulted in substantial discharges to the St. Lucie Estuary and Caloosahatchee River such that concern exists regarding the health of these waterbodies; and

**WHEREAS**, appropriate modifications to the Lake's regulation schedule are needed to better accomplish the multi-purpose Lake functions and to benefit the

Lake and estuarine ecosystems, particularly if made in conjunction with structural changes enabling water supply deliveries from the Lake at lower levels; and

**WHEREAS**, installation and operation of permanent forward pumps and other structural changes capable of conveying water supplies and discharging water out of Lake Okeechobee at low levels would address the Lake's multi-purpose objectives as well as a lower Lake regulation schedule; and

**WHEREAS**, the current regulation schedule for Lake Okeechobee can be improved to enhance the health of the Lake and estuaries while addressing the Lake's multi-purpose objectives; and

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BOARD  
OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT:**

**Section 1.** The Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District requests the COE, on an expedited basis, take actions necessary to modify the Lake Okeechobee Water Control Plan, including the Lake's Water Supply and Environment Regulation Schedule, for the purpose of achieving a more refined balance between the competing needs of the Lake ecosystem, estuarine ecosystems, flood control, recreation, and water supply; and achieving routine operation of the Lake at lower levels while addressing the Lake's multi-purpose objectives through installation and operation of forward pumps; and

**Section 2.** The Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District intends to support its request for expeditious modification to the Lake's regulation schedule by providing the COE with appropriate technical support; and

**Section 3.** The Governing Board of the South Florida requests the COE to assume the future presence of permanent forward pumps in some of the alternatives considered when preparing the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Study; and

**Section 4.** The Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District intends to engage in the design of permanent forward pumps in conjunction with

the COE while the COE takes actions necessary to modify the Lake Okeechobee Water Control Plan; and

**Section 5.** The Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District hereby encourages member counties of the Nine-County Coalition to adopt similar Resolutions; and

**Section 6.** This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

**PASSED** and **ADOPTED** this \_\_\_\_\_ day of October, 2005.

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER  
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT, BY ITS  
GOVERNING BOARD**

By:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair

ATTEST By:

\_\_\_\_\_  
District Clerk/Secretary

Approved as to form:

By:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Office of Counsel